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Statement submitted by Sudanese Women General Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The Sudanese Women General Union is a non-governmental voluntary organization that works to empower women economically, socially and politically through the activities and projects which it implements at its 27,000 branches located throughout the Sudan. The Union seeks to establish a society in which justice and equality are achieved in order to ensure the rights of women and children. To this end, it develops strategies, policies, plans and programmes to strengthen and promote the role of women. The Union has set up a database on the condition of women, and has also prepared a review of national, regional and international commitments on women's empowerment. It has worked to establish networks of non-governmental organizations and put in place capacity-building programmes to promote and protect women's constitutional rights, advance the well-being of women and children, reduce their mortality rates, and increase women's awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and how to protect against them. It also promotes participation in peacebuilding, the dissemination of a culture of peace, and the eradication of illiteracy, including digital illiteracy. The Union was granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 2007.

The Union has launched a number of initiatives in the area of economic empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas. They include the Women's Portfolio Project for microfinance, which was followed by a programme for soft loans and an innovation prize for rural women. All these projects have contributed to reducing poverty among women and raising their standard of living. Then came the initiative to establish the Amal Women's Microfinance Foundation with a view to reinforcing previous initiatives and uniting efforts. It was established in partnership with the Central Bank of Sudan and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security. Branches were opened in nine of Sudan's states, and in 2014, the Foundation helped 2,894 individuals to access microcredit, of whom only 1.4 per cent defaulted on their payments. The Union has to deal with many challenges during its efforts to train women on how to run successful projects, as it receives no support from the international community in this area of its work.

With regard to its social work, the Union has set up 110 development centres across the Sudan, which work to deliver comprehensive social, health and educational services, and also offer family counselling, with a view to teaching families about justice, gender equality, inheritance rights and the health risks of female genital mutilation and early marriage. The Union has also set up children's education centres within these development centres, to which it supplies teaching aids and kindergarten services.

The Union is also an active member of the national commission for displaced persons. It campaigns to raise awareness of the issue and to protect displaced persons, and it works to reunite people with their families. The Union also works to provide health care to elderly persons and to improve their living environments, as well as to raise service providers' awareness of the need to improve the level of care given to elderly individuals. It also supports a number of care centres for disabled persons, and it helps to provide disabled persons with health and education services and with various subsidies. However, providing continuous, wide-spread, qualitative service is an ongoing challenge.

The Union has run a number of health projects, the most prominent of which was a project to ensure that every village had a midwife, although it was unable to cover all the regions in need. As part of its project to provide comprehensive health coverage in the Sudan, it formed 7,000 community networks to expand health services, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups (women and children). The

Union has taken the lead among Sudanese civil society organizations in the global movement to promote nutrition and eliminate malnutrition among children and pregnant or lactating women, as well as the push to end hunger and improve food security. It has also been instrumental in increasing midwife coverage to 95 per cent for grass-roots communities, with a view to decreasing maternal and newborn mortality. It has also taken the lead in campaigns for the early detection of breast and cervical cancer.

Lastly, the Union calls for increased support for projects and for increased training of organization personnel.